

## LANGUAGE, TONE AND AUDIENCE

### LANGUAGE

- Choose language that will help you to express yourself clearly and effectively.
- Select appropriate language that is specific to your writing goal or situation.
- Develop a rich and extensive vocabulary to create variety in your language choices.

### **Colloquial Language**

Colloquial language is used in informal writing situations and creates a conversational tone in the writing. Everyday spoken language gives your writing a casual, relaxed effect. Colloquial language is not necessarily “wrong,” but it is used when a writer is trying to achieve informality. Some college writing assignments may require writers not to use colloquial language; these assignments may necessitate writers to employ language that creates a formal tone and that is discipline specific. Most writers employ a variety of prewriting and rhetorical strategies during the drafting, revising, and editing states of the writing process.

Informal: Some adults *haven't got a clue about* what is important to the younger generation.  
Formal: Adults may not be aware of what is important to the younger generation.

Informal: I *don't* want my *kid* sister *tagging along with* my friends and me.  
Formal: I do not want my younger sister accompanying my friends and me.

### **Sexist and Racist Language**

Language can often reflect harmful prejudices that people have toward particular groups. For example, racist language is directed at specific racial or ethnic groups and attacks people using words that would not be tolerated in writing or in any speech situation. Sexist language is directed against women and men. It may present negatively biased ideas about occupation, social roles, behavior, and values of each sex.

Sexist language can be patronizing:  
*Ladies* are increasingly entering professions previously restricted to them.  
Women are increasingly entering professions previously restricted to them.

Sexist language can create stereotypes:  
The considerate doctor commends a nurse when *she* provides *his* patients with good care.  
Considerate doctors commend nurses when they provide patients with good care.

Sexist language makes gender-specific generalizations:  
*Man* has not reached his full technological potential.  
Humans have not yet reached their full technological potential.

Sexist language can exclude genders:

*Freshmen* are expected to pass their college's entrance exams.

First-year college students are expected to pass their entrance exams.

### **Abstract and Concrete Language**

*Abstract words* name qualities and ideas: *beauty, love, liberal, freedom, independence, and obscenity*. Abstract words may evoke different meanings based on individuals' subjective interpretation of the words. Instead, use more precise language to convey your exact meaning.

Example: On her vacation, she had *beautiful* weather at the beach.

Revised: On her vacation at the beach, Nancy enjoyed the powder-blue sky dotted with puffy, white clouds, and the sun sparkled on the azure ocean water.

*Concrete or specific words* identify what writers and audiences know based on the five senses: sound, sight, smell, touch, and taste. Words such as bitter, salty, screeching, humming, slick, sharp, foggy, and prickly are specific language.

Example: Sandy's dress was green.

Revised: Sandy's micro mini-dress was the color of lime-green Jell-O.

### **TONE**

In writing, tone is created by the language authors choose to use with the intention of presenting the piece of writing to a particular audience. Tone is also related to the persona, or the image that writers intend to portray to audiences. Tone can range from sarcastic, to humorous, to serious, to questioning, to angry, to persuasive, or to informative. Of course, there are various tones writers can achieve using language; however, the language chosen depends on the purpose and the point they want to convey or emphasize.

Questions can help writers and readers discover the *tone* in writing:

- Does the writer use slang or colloquial language? Is the tone conversational?
- Does the writer use jargon and, therefore, directs the writing toward a specialized audience?
- Does the writer use discipline-specific language?
- What language does the writer use to create a certain tone?
- Is the writing academic or technical, intended for a specific field?
- Is the tone formal or informal?
- Is the writer evoking a specific reaction or emotion from an audience through the use of tone?

When writers define the purpose and goals of their writing, they should pay attention to the tone they want to create to achieve the most effective results in their prose. The tone affects the writer's *style* and distinctive *voice*. When readers examine a piece of writing, they should try to determine the tone to better understand the writer's *purpose* for writing and the *audience* the writer intends to reach.

## **AUDIENCE**

Writers produce their most effective writing when it is directed at a specific *audience*. When writers have an audience in mind or know their audience's characteristics well, they relay ideas by using language and tone that their audience will appreciate and understand. For example, when writing for a group of people in the computer industry, technical language and jargon related to that field can be used without confusing the audience. Also, writing for a specific audience allows the writer to make definite *appeals* to the *emotions, logic, and ethics* of the audience. Appeals to these three areas are especially effective in persuasive writing. In order for appeals to be effective, writers should know their audience's values, beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and interests. If the audience belongs to a specific group, sometimes writers can make assumptions about prior knowledge.

Questions can help writers understand their *audience*:

- What is the composition of my audience? Characteristics? Demographics?
- Will they understand the language that I am using?
- What beliefs, values, and logical ideas do my audience subscribe to?
- Will my audience appreciate the particular tone I am using to persuade or inform them on an issue?

Writers should consider language, tone, and audience and evaluate the use of these elements in their own writing. These three areas of writing significantly affect the effective communication of ideas.